

Do Better by **vcatrashfiend**

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Romance

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-09-12 14:39:21

Updated: 2016-09-12 14:39:21

Packaged: 2019-12-17 14:36:41

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,929

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Jim Hopper's life was lousy with instances where he could have done better... Pre-Stranger Things with a whole lot of teen angst.

Do Better

Notes: Just a little one shot I threw together. All characters belong to The Duffer Brothers

Do Better

Jim Hopper's life was lousy with instances where he could have done better. When he was five years old, he was playing on the seesaw with Desiree Parker at her birthday party. The other kids liked playing on the seesaw with Jim. He was the heaviest kid in class, so when he dropped, the other child would practically catapult into the air. It was thrilling, and had just the right amount of danger without being outright hazardous.

The cake was announced. Jim had two feet pressed firmly onto the ground, Desiree was suspended in midair... but not for long. Jim had never had ice cream cake. Desiree had promised him ice cream cake. In a hurry to satisfy his curiosity, he jumped from his seat on the seesaw, and rushed for the picnic table. Desiree received six stitches in the back of her head to match her six years on the earth. She also wore hats for a very long time after that.

As Jim sobbed into his pillow that night, unable to sleep, his mother had walked into his bedroom, sat on the edge of his bed, stroked his back and murmured, "Do better."

He tried, truly he did; when Joyce Calloway and her family moved into town, in a house that was adjacent to the nice neighborhood but was not the nice neighborhood, Jim and his mother (head of the PTA) had gone over to greet them. Joyce was starting second grade mid fall term, so Mrs. Hopper wanted to make sure that the girl knew about all the resources the school offered to get her caught up. Jim carried the strawberry-rhubarb pie, and was there to show Joyce that it was easy to make friends.

He had looked around the threadbare living room of the Calloway residence, and found it to be dreary. In another decade the mismatched furnishings and homespun coverings would be considered "Shabby chic". To Jim, at that moment in the late 1950s,

it was just ugly. The girl, Joyce, was scrawny, pale, and –to Jim– alien eyed. Large, unblinking dark orbs staring up at him from behind her father. It was unnerving. It robbed him of proper speech. His mom pinched his arm when he missed his cue to speak up.

"Where's your TV?" That had not been the right thing to say. Again, his mother came to his room that night, and told him to do better. He promised. He couldn't risk going another month with his comic books locked up in his father's safe.

Years later, he tried to better by that awkward little girl. Of course, by the time he got the motivation, she was not awkward anymore. Joyce had grown into a petite, elvish beauty. Her eyes were still unusually large, but her small oval face had more or less caught up with them. Her lips were a generous, cherry-tinged cupid's bow, and she had the innate ability to make her shabby, second hand clothes appear effortlessly couture on her elegant figure. Her decision to chop off all her hair into what would become known as "The Pixie Cut" came a whole three months before Twiggy Lawson made it into a craze. The general consensus was that the Calloways were dirt poor, but Joyce was *interesting*.

He asked her out, and she said yes. He told himself he was definitely doing better by her. He was comfortably middle class, and she was poor. He could show off his largess by taking her to nicer places than Benny's Burgers, he even offered to buy her a dress for Spring Formal. To take her into Indianapolis for the trip. She laughed, rolled her eyes and said, "Why not?" as though she was indulging him, and not the other way around. That had irked him. What good was doing better if the recipient of your efforts just rolled their eyes at you?

What was more, doing better never got him any further than a few minutes of exploration under her shirt, but over her bra. Not that it was all bad. The frenetic energy and boundless restlessness that defined Joyce during the day, at school, at work, translated into aching intensity at night, during their moments alone. She kissed him like he was going away to war- which was becoming a very real possibility- like she was never going to see him again. She kissed with tongue and teeth and a fierceness that left him breathless and angry when she would push his hands away, pull away from his bruised mouth and announce, "That's enough, Hop". Her mother had had her

young. It had been an unhappy mistake that had led to an unhappy marriage. Joyce had reservations, and if Jim had allowed his thinking to be conducted north of the equator, he would have been sympathetic.

He tried to do better when Chrissy Carpenter, silly on spiked punch, hit on him at Spring Formal right in front of Joyce. Tried to do better when – pickled on the same punch- he abandoned his date to go make out with Chrissy in the auditorium, and then fuck her in his car. He still liked Joyce, he could just relate to Chrissy more. They could talk about family trips to the lake, vacations to Colorado. Joyce's family didn't even own a boat. When he sobered up the next day, and was told by an angry Karen Sanders that Joyce had left the party and walked the two miles home in the dark, he felt terrible.

He tried to do better when he stopped her in the hall that Monday, her eyes raw from weeping and her head aching from listening to "I'd Rather Go Blind" by Etta James on a loop on the little suitcase record player he had gotten her for Christmas. He blamed the alcohol, he blamed Chrissy. He did not blame himself, but he did call himself an idiot. She took him back, kissing him in the hallway, tasting of tears and undeserved sweetness.

He should have done better when Lonnie Byers came into the picture. Byers was a high school dropout that still hung out near the school. Joyce complained to Jim that Lonnie had been following her home, pestering her, and could you please walk me home from now on, Hop? He had shrugged and said that he'd love to, but he had football practice after school. He would take care of Byers if he saw him try anything funny.

Football made it hard to do better. To do anything. The team was doing so well in his Senior year, they were on the fast track to the championship. Since Joyce wasn't a cheerleader, it was nearly impossible to maintain their relationship. He didn't break things off, but he wasn't paying attention either. He loved her, and wanted her to be around, but he didn't want to make much of an effort to make sure that she would. He soon forgot what she said about Byers. It wasn't concerning him much. Byers was a 23 year old burnout and Joyce was just a kid who wouldn't give it up.

These beliefs made it hard to do better when she did give it up. To Byers. Jim was faintly aware that he was not showing her the understanding that she had shown him when their positions were reversed. She even had similar reasons. There had been alcohol, Lonnie had been charming and attentive. She barely remembered it happening.

He could have done better than calling her trash and telling her that she was just like her mother, but he didn't. He found out, late into the summer after he graduated, that Byers had gotten her pregnant. The wedding pictures his mother showed him when she made a trip to campus featured a stone faced Joyce in a simple white dress, slight swell to her belly. The misery in her face stirred something in Jim, but it was not enough to make him act on it.

Jim married Diane, they had a daughter. He did much better by them than he did by anyone in his entire life. That had not been enough. When Sarah died, he figured that doing better got a person nowhere, so he did worse. Diane left him, and he left the city. If he was going to do bad, he would do it in Hawkins, he figured.

When he got his first call to the Byer's residence, he didn't do better, he didn't do bad, but what he did sure felt good. Joyce had opened the front door, and he had taken an involuntary step back. Her lip was bleeding and her nose was swollen. Rage sliced through him like a hot knife.

"I didn't know they'd send you." Her voice was a quivering mess of thick, suffocating emotion.

"Where is he?" Joyce just shook her head, and sobbed into her hand. Her oldest boy stepped up behind her, face twisted in a mask of righteous fury.

"He went to Sadie's Pub. He hit Will, and Mom tried to stop him, so he went off on her. Make him go away."

Yes, it felt good, pummeling that weasel-faced bastard into the ground. The suspension had been so fucking worth it, watching Lonnie Byers beg and plead as Jim landed right hook after right hook against his face. It had taken three officers to pull him off of the son

of a bitch. Later, when he was icing his knuckles, he wondered how much of his actions were outrage at a man raising his hand to a woman, and how much was a blood soaked mea culpa to Joyce. He owed her so much more, but since getting into a time machine and kicking the tar out of his teenaged self was impossible, beating the shit out of Lonnie Byers had to do for now.

A few years later, with Lonnie out of the picture, Jim tried to do better. He thought he had succeeded. He did everything right; he believed her (eventually), he fought by her side – he would have left the world bleeding to help her find her boy. In a way, he did. He sold out that girl, Eleven, in order to grant Joyce passage to the Upside Down. He was aware that that in itself was not good, and it did not feel good, but the look on her face, that broken relief... it had been worth it. He wasn't doing better by anyone but her and her family, but that was fine. He was tired.

Months later, when he figured out that he didn't want to just do better by her – that he just plain wanted her- their lovemaking was peppered with apologies from him. She had just laughed, rolled her eyes, and kissed him with the same intensity of their teen years. To Joyce, he was a hero. She had brought her boy back from the dead. To Jim, he knew he could spend the rest of his life making amends, and still not feel like he was doing better. Maybe that would change if he brought back Eleven, coax her out of hiding with treats. For now, he would have to be satisfied in that fact that he was merely doing okay.